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Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

6894th meeting
Wednesday, 19 December 2012, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Loulichki	(Morocco)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Harcep Singh Puri
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Portugal	Mr. Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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12-65555 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: This is the final briefing on the Middle East for 2012. While I spoke to the Council with concern a few months ago about how the world's gaze was shifting away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is fair to say that recent events have forced it right back into focus. What has transpired in the closing months of this year should remind us, at the very least, just how much the momentum for the two-State solution has slipped and just how hard we should be working in the year ahead to reverse this trend while there is still time to do so.

As Council members are well aware, on 29 November the General Assembly accorded Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, which was greeted by peaceful celebrations across the West Bank and Gaza. Following that important vote, the Secretary-General underlined that the Palestinians have a legitimate right to their own independent State, and that Israel has the right to live in peace and security with its neighbours. There remains no substitute for negotiations to that end, and the vote underscores the urgent need to resume meaningful talks. The Secretary-General, dismayed by some of the language used by various parties on the occasion of that vote, also appealed to all concerned to act responsibly.

Following the adoption of resolution 67/19, the Israeli Government announced that it would approve plans for settlement construction of 3,000 housing units in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and, most alarmingly, indicated that planning would proceed on several thousand housing units in the E-1 area of the West Bank between Jerusalem and the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. The Secretary-General has expressed his grave concern and disappointment over those announcements. Many international leaders have done the same. In addition, the Israeli Government decided to expedite the construction of some 6,500 housing units in East Jerusalem that have already been approved, including in Givat Hamatos. Settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violates international law and is an obstacle to peace. If implemented, the plans would represent an almost fatal blow to the remaining chances of securing a two-State solution.

These developments add to an increasing number of settlement approvals in recent months. According to reports from non-governmental organizations, there has been a threefold increase in the number of new settler housing units issued for tender in 2012 compared to 2011. Given the clear history of how settlements have developed and expanded since the signing of the Oslo Accords, we are not reassured by comments by some Israeli officials to the effect that the announcements are in part only symbolic in nature. We strongly urge the Israeli Government to heed the wide international calls to rescind those plans.

On 12 December, Israel's Minister of Finance signed the forfeiture of Palestinian funds in the amount of 435 million shekels — approximately $115 million — which were transferred to the Israel Electric Corporation. While the Secretary-General has noted his appreciation of Israel's willingness in recent months to advance clearance revenues to the Palestinians to address fiscal needs, we believe that this unilateral Israeli decision on the use of Palestinian funds undermines the integrity of the Palestinian Authority.

Moreover, the decision of the Government of Israel to withhold Palestinian revenues casts doubt upon Israeli compliance with Paris Protocol provisions related to the full, timely, predictable and transparent transfer of tax and customs revenues. It comes while the Palestinians already face a dire fiscal situation that puts at risk the considerable achievements made by the Palestinian Authority in recent years under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. The Palestinian Government has been unable to pay the salaries of its employees. Demonstrations by Palestinian teachers to protest such non-payment took place in the West Bank on 16 December and on the following days. We call on Israel to reconsider its decision and to resume the transfer of revenues without

delay. We also stress the importance of Israel and the Palestinian Authority determining through direct talks the resolution of any outstanding financial claims.

On 9 December, the Follow-up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative of the League of Arab States met in Doha. Its final communiqué outlined intended next steps, including transferring additional funds to the Palestinian Authority to compensate for revenue lost as a result of retaliatory measures related to the General Assembly vote. The Secretary-General hopes that the Arab States and others that expressed their support for the Palestinian vote in the General Assembly will indeed follow through with tangible, rapid and generous disbursements to help the Palestinian Authority address the needs of the Palestinian people on the ground. The Arab League also expressed doubt about the international architecture for the peace process and announced future consultations with stakeholders in the international community.

Palestinian leaders have discussed going beyond the General Assembly vote to approach additional international bodies. In particular, President Abbas has stated that the Israeli announcement related to E-1 has crossed what he describes as a "red line". A dangerous stand-off has emerged as a result. Confrontational statements from both sides will only lead the parties further away from achieving the two-State solution that remains their stated commitment. It is vital that the parties avoid negative steps that undermine the situation on the ground and complicate a return to negotiations.

In that context, Quartet envoys met in Brussels on 12 December. They discussed ways to help the parties avoid escalation diplomatically and on the ground in the short-term, while also finding a way back to negotiations. It is clear that new impetus must be found for substantial peace efforts early in 2013. To that end, the United Nations will continue its active engagement with all concerned.

Regional actors and Quartet partners have an important role to play. On 10 December, the Foreign Ministers of the European Union (EU) reaffirmed the EU positions, including on parameters for negotiations, and reiterated that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a strategic priority. The Arab Peace Initiative also remains a critical supportive framework that should be encouraged and nurtured.

The backdrop to those developments is a worsening security situation in the West Bank, a fragile calm in Gaza after last month's round of hostilities, and a shifting geopolitical landscape in the region. In the West Bank, the effectiveness of the Palestinian security forces and their coordination with Israeli security forces were repeatedly tested during the reporting period. Citing security concerns, Israeli security forces increased operations and arrests in the occupied West Bank.

From 27 November to 17 December, a total of 182 operations resulted in two Palestinians killed, 159 Palestinians injured and 182 Palestinians arrested, while seven Israeli soldiers were also injured. It is of particular concern that Israeli forces reportedly arrested several members of the Palestinian security forces and intelligence. On 6 December in central Hebron, a confrontation between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police officers reportedly resulted in injuries to nine Palestinians and the arrest of over 20 Palestinians.

In another incident, on 3 December near Nablus, a Palestinian allegedly rammed his vehicle into another vehicle carrying Israeli security personnel. According to Israeli reports, the Palestinian then attacked the soldiers with an axe, injuring two. Israeli security forces shot and killed the Palestinian. On 12 December in central Hebron, a Palestinian teenager was shot dead by Israeli forces as he allegedly threatened soldiers. Riots followed and more than 20 Palestinians were injured.

Confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli settlers occurred on an almost daily basis, mostly consisting of stone throwing on both sides, resulting in injuries and material damage. So-called price tag attacks vandalized Palestinian assets near Ramallah and Hebron and desecrated a Christian monastery in West Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly expressed revulsion at those events. On 4 December, Israeli security forces detained three Israelis near Hebron suspected of carrying out such attacks.

Israeli security forces demolished 14 structures in the occupied West Bank, including the mosque in Al-Mafkara near Hebron. These demolitions resulted in the displacement of 41 Palestinians. In another worrisome development, in the early hours of 11 December, Israeli security forces, in another incursion into the Palestinian-controlled Area A, raided the Ramallah headquarters of three Palestinian non-governmental organizations and reportedly

confiscated sensitive materials, including computers and cameras.

Three recently arrested members of the Palestinian Legislative Council were sentenced to a six-month administrative detention. We are alarmed by the news of the arrest of more than 500 Palestinians in November in the West Bank, which is more than double the number of arrests reported in the September and October briefings.

We continue to be concerned about the approximately 4,400 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centres. Their situation was discussed at an Arab League conference on Palestinian prisoners, which was held in Baghdad from 11 to 12 December. We are particularly worried by indications that some detainees have continued their hunger strikes, despite initial progress after the agreement to end hunger strikes in May. On 2 December, Israeli authorities resumed family visits for Gazan prisoners jailed in Israel.

On 12 December, the Palestinian Cabinet announced that the second round of local elections will take place on 22 December, after being postponed owing to the outbreak of violence in Gaza.

The calm in Gaza, brokered by Egypt on 21 November, has largely held, but it remains tenuous. Since the last briefing, one rocket has been fired from Gaza into Israel and one Israeli tank shell has landed in Gaza. Israeli security forces conducted two incursions into Gaza. One Palestinian civilian was killed and 37 Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli fire, mostly while attempting to approach the border fence. A number of Gaza fishermen were also attacked by Israeli forces while navigating in the vicinity of the new fishing limit of six nautical miles, resulting in one fisherman being shot and injured, over 30 briefly arrested and the damage to, and confiscation of, some Palestinian fishing boats.

More generally, the impact of last month's violence has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of some of the Gaza Strip's poorest people and left up to 3,000 people in need of emergency shelter support. In terms of humanitarian funding requirements identified by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations partners, $12 to $13 million are required to meet immediate needs just for the remainder of 2012. Moreover, at least $70 million are required to kick-start the humanitarian response in the first months of 2013.

The Hamas leader, Khaled Mashaal, visited Gaza for the first time from 7 to 10 December. His visit coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Hamas, an event that was attended by a number of foreign delegations and Fatah. Khaled Meshaal expressed support for an end to the division of Palestinian. The United Nations supports Palestinian reconciliation in the context of the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments, which remain a central and yet unimplemented element of resolution 1860 (2009). But the United Nations condemns the inflammatory remarks made by Khaled Mashaal with regard to Israel in his main speech and rejects any attempt to promote violence as a way to achieve political goals or deny Israel's right to exist. Israel has legitimate security concerns, which must be respected, and ignoring or dismissing Israel's legitimate security concerns undermines the prospects for a two-State solution.

I would like to reiterate that the ceasefire provides an opportunity to address the underlying causes of conflict captured in resolution 1860 (2009). While talks continue in the effort to implement the understanding with regard to the ceasefire, we strongly urge all parties to strictly abide by the understanding, starting with security. The parties must agree on policy changes that address the causes of instability in Gaza and the recurrent eruptions of violence. Such changes must include an end to weapons smuggling and a full opening of crossings.

The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process remains in close contact with Egyptian authorities, with a view to encouraging progress on all aspects of the understanding with regard to the ceasefire. In particular, we advocate for a further extension of the maritime boundary; unrestricted entry of aggregate, iron bar and cement; and transfers of goods between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as exports to Israel and beyond. In parallel, it is important that tangible means be identified and implemented so as to end weapons smuggling. The United Nations stands ready to assist the parties in all aspects of those issues.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, where conflict is now in its twenty-second month, violence and military confrontation have escalated dangerously. The Secretary-General, in a statement over the weekend, expressed his growing alarm over that escalation, particularly the reports of sectarian killings in the

village of Aqrab in Hama province and the violence that has engulfed the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus. All parties are failing in their obligations to protect civilians. The Council should remind those engaged in hostilities of their obligations to abide by international humanitarian law and should stress the consequences for those who fail to do so.

Valerie Amos briefed the Council in private consultations two days ago on her visit to Syria and stressed the severity of the increasing humanitarian crisis. More than half a million people have fled the violence to become registered refugees in Syria's neighbours and other States. Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq now host over 150,000, 145,000, 135,000 and 65,000 Syrian refugees respectively, making Lebanon host to the largest registered number of Syrian refugees in the region. In addition, there is a growing number of Palestinian refugees from Syria present in Lebanon, including 2,000 to 4,000 who have crossed in recent days, mainly coming from the Yarmuk camp.

During their recent respective visits to the region, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General witnessed at first hand the dire situation of the Syrian refugees. They thanked the host countries for their hospitality and generosity and pledged to call on donors to lessen their financial burden.

While it is important that Syria's neighbours continue to allow those fleeing violence in Syria to enter their countries, helping those countries cope with the situation and address the needs of the refugees must be a priority for the international community. We ask donors to contribute more generously to our efforts and respond to the revised appeal that is launched today. Only about half of what is needed to meet the needs of people inside Syria and the refugees has been received. This is grossly inadequate.

As we have repeatedly underlined, the military approach pursued by both sides in Syria comes at a devastating cost in terms of human lives and destruction, and it breeds a serious risk of sectarian and communal strife, radicalization and terrorism. If nothing is done to change the current dynamic and to move toward a political solution, the destruction of Syria will be the likely outcome.

Long-standing fears that the conflict in Syria would seriously threaten the stability and security of Syria's neighbours have intensified. During his trip earlier this month to Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, the Secretary-General heard from all the leaders he met expressions of concern about the possible political and security fallout.

In addition to Syria's neighbours, the conflict in Syria has also directly affected the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) area of operation and consequently the ability of UNDOF to fulfil its mandate, as acknowledged in resolution 2084 (2012), which this Council adopted a moment ago. On Monday, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous briefed this Council in detail on the recent report of the Secretary-General on UNDOF (S/2012/897), including on daily clashes between the Syrian army and armed opposition in the area of separation, and several occasions of direct and indirect fire at UNDOF positions or convoys, in particular an incident on 29 November in which peacekeepers were injured.

In this connection, allow me to reiterate that the primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Syrian Government. Countries with influence should also impress upon the armed members of the opposition the importance of ensuring the freedom of movement and the safety of UNDOF personnel. More generally, let me take this opportunity to remind all belligerents that they must respect and ensure the safety and security of all United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones.

The situation in Lebanon remains severely affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria. Cross-border shelling and arms smuggling continue. Multiple reports suggest that there are Lebanese implicated in Syria's violence, both on the side of the Al-Assad regime and the opposition. This violates the Lebanese Government's dissociation policy and puts Lebanon increasingly at risk.

On 30 November, according to reports, approximately 14 Lebanese fighters were killed by Syrian regime forces near the town of Talkalakh in Syria. The Talkalakh incident sparked a new round of fighting in Tripoli between the Sunni neighbourhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the Alawite community of Jebel Mohsen, resulting in approximately 14 killed and over 60 injured. Calm was restored after the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed heavily in the neighbourhoods affected and around the city, following the adoption of a new security plan by the Higher Defence Council on 9 December.

Once again, the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces are to be commended for their role in containing threats to Lebanon's security and stability. During his visit to Lebanon, from 9 to 11 December, the Deputy Secretary-General reinforced to all his interlocutors our strong message of support for Lebanon's efforts to preserve internal stability, unity and dialogue against the difficult backdrop of the Syrian crisis.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet. There was, however, an explosion on 17 December near the southern village of Tayr Haifa. The nature and circumstances of the explosion are being investigated by UNIFIL in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The increased operational tempo of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces during the recent hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has since reverted to previous levels. UNIFIL maintained its enhanced presence across its area of operations as the Lebanese Armed Forces continued to operate at a lower strength of approximately two brigades and one battalion. Israeli violations of the Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis.

On both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is too much pain and anguish, disillusionment and dismay and — as we saw in the recent violence between Gaza and Israel — genuine fear and frustration. As fellow human beings, I hope we can all feel empathy for both the Palestinians and Israelis, who, in wanting to raise their children to live normal, happy, peaceful lives in viable independent States, are not seeking unreasonable goals. At the same time, we must not allow the airing of bitterness and grievances, however strongly felt, to be a substitute for the constructive, hard work of practical, tangible conflict resolution.

With the New Year nearly upon us, we believe that it is important to look forward in the hope that we can work collectively to change the dynamic of impasse to one of real momentum towards a two-State solution. Whatever it may mean in a practical sense, the General Assembly vote last month symbolizes the growing international impatience with the long-standing occupation and a resounding endorsement of Palestinian aspirations to live in freedom and dignity in an independent State of their own, side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The year 2013 will be decisive to the peace process. It is incumbent upon all of us to support the parties in stabilizing the situation and then permitting progress towards the goal of achieving a two-State solution that is so critical for regional peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the topic.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.